

## THE MOTHER OF ALL MISSIONS

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Imagine driving a route as long as the state of Missouri in the summertime at an exhausting 5 miles per hour in four days or less. Now imagine doing the same drive but there are no rest stops along the way; the average daily temperature maxes out at over 100 degrees; you must bring your own fuel, food, and water; you're riding in a 15-ton armored vehicle; you're escorting four massive trailers carrying multimillion dollar generators piloted and maintained by a work crew that speaks an entirely different language; and oh by the way every dip and bend in the road could hold a possible bomb. Sound like a daunting task? Welcome to the world of 4<sup>th</sup> platoon, 937<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company, tasked with providing route clearance support for the mother of all generators through western Al Anbar province.

In today's Army, Route Clearance is a fairly new, but highly essential, mission designed to protect hundreds of combat patrols and convoys operating throughout Iraq on a daily basis. For the deployed Soldiers of 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon, 937<sup>th</sup> Engineer Clearance Company out of Fort Hood, no clearance mission is more important than what is known only as "the MOAG". The Mother of All Generators, or MOAG, is actually 20 individual generators that produce 17 megawatts each and weigh over 170 tons. One Soldier describes the MOAG as "the biggest thing I have ever seen on wheels." Altogether, the 20 pieces will make a power plant to bring much needed energy to the people of Samarra, Iraq.

Getting these massive generators from the Jordanian border to their destination is a complicated and dangerous task that takes 16 days traveling at a mind-numbing 5 miles per hour. Too tall to go under bridges, and too heavy to travel over them, the MOAG takes a complex route led the entire way by a route clearance team. The purpose of route clearance is to find and neutralize Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, that are emplaced along the road. Such a large and slow moving object as the MOAG is the perfect target for such attacks by insurgents looking to disrupt the efforts of a recovering society. However, Sgt. Carr of second squad says "the Soldiers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon are not going to allow an IED to hit the MOAG on our watch."

Stepping off before sunrise and ending at sunset, these Soldiers spend the entire day traveling on high alert looking for suspicious objects and enemy activity. Thus far, 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon has cleared roughly half of the 500 mile mission on four separate MOAG operations.

According to Spc. Willis, "The MOAG is the most exhausting mission that we do here in Iraq. No other mission demands of us 12 hours of clearing during the day, pulling security at night, and a painful sleep in our trucks when we rest."

Although there are many challenges associated with transporting the MOAG, none may be more difficult than trying to fight off the boredom of such a long day. Just like back in the US, slow and steady movement along a straight road can put anybody to sleep, even in Iraq. Practical jokes, trash talk, and delving into one another's past are usually the only things to keep everyone awake on a 14 hour mission. Sugar highs from junk food will do the trick to keep Soldiers awake for a little while, but after four days of Meals Ready to Eat, handfuls of candy, Slim-Jims, beef jerky, Honey Buns and loads of energy drinks the Soldiers get burnt out on unhealthy food. After four missions now with the same Iraqi Soldiers and contractors assigned to help transport the MOAG, the Soldiers of 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon have made friends with many of the Iraqis. There have even been occasions where the Iraqis have offered some of their own personal food, but the Soldiers are still quite hesitant to accept.

Besides just providing the people of Samarra with more electricity, the MOAG is also a symbol of how Iraq's infrastructure is moving in the right direction.

Spc. Jones of Lowell, Massachusetts says, "The coolest thing about the MOAG missions is that we actually feel like we are delivering the generators to the people of Iraq. We feel a lot of responsibility to keep them safe."

Despite the feeling of satisfaction when leading the MOAGs through Iraq, 4<sup>th</sup> Platoon is more than happy to hand off the generators to their counterparts in 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon.

“It’s awesome when 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon shows up. For us it means hot chow, a shower, and a good night’s sleep for the first time in a week”, according to Pfc. Camardelle from Raymond, MS.

The 937<sup>th</sup> has cleared over 40,000 miles of road since deploying last April and will be there until July '09. With Iraq only continuing to improve, there may be many MOAG missions left to accomplish.



1st Picture: Fourth Platoon, 937<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company next to a MOAG and a banner that reads, “Paid for by the people of Iraq, for the people of Iraq.”



2nd Picture: Fourth Platoon, 937<sup>th</sup> Engineer Route Clearance Company posing with some of their equipment.